

Members

Sen. Sue Landske, Chairperson
Sen. Joseph Zakas
Sen. Ron Alting
Sen. Rose Antich
Sen. William Alexa
Sen. Earline Rogers
Rep. Charlie Brown, Vice-Chairperson
Rep. Linda Lawson
Rep. Dan Stevenson
Rep. Ralph Ayres
Rep. Daniel Dumezich
Rep. Dean Mock
William Pemberton
Duane W. Dedelow



NORTHWEST INDIANA TRANSPORTATION STUDY COMMISSION

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Authority: P.L. 140-2001

MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: October 30, 2002
Meeting Time: 9:30 A.M.
Meeting Place: Northwestern Indiana Regional
Planning Commission, Meeting
Room
Meeting City: Portage, Indiana
Meeting Number: 2

Members Present: Sen. Sue Landske, Chairperson; Sen. Joseph Zakas; Sen. Rose Antich; Sen. William Alexa; Sen. Earline Rogers; Rep. Charlie Brown, Vice-Chairperson; Rep. Dan Stevenson; Rep. Ralph Ayres; Rep. Dean Mock; Duane W. Dedelow.

Members Absent: Sen. Ron Alting; Rep. Linda Lawson; Rep. Daniel Dumezich; William Pemberton.

Sen. Landske called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m.

¹ Exhibits and other materials referenced in these minutes can be inspected and copied in the Legislative Information Center in Room 230 of the State House in Indianapolis, Indiana. Requests for copies may be mailed to the Legislative Information Center, Legislative Services Agency, 200 West Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2789. A fee of \$0.15 per page and mailing costs will be charged for copies. These minutes are also available on the Internet at the General Assembly homepage. The URL address of the General Assembly homepage is <http://www.ai.org/legislative/>. No fee is charged for viewing, downloading, or printing minutes from the Internet.

Public Testimony and Commission Discussion

Michiana Area Council of Governments

Sandra Seanor presented the ongoing work of the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG). Ms. Seanor reviewed the origins and development of MACOG. Ms. Seanor updated the Commission on recent projects of MACOG. Ms. Seanor also described MACOG's ongoing research and planning activities and noted the council's close working relationship with the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT). Ms. Seanor's presentation is Exhibit A.

Extension of the Northwest Indiana Transportation Study Commission

Upon the motion of Rep. Charlie Brown, the Commission voted 9-0 to recommend Preliminary Draft 3709 for passage to the General Assembly. The draft would, if passed, postpone the Commission's expiration from November 1, 2003 to November 1, 2005.

Lake County Regional Transportation Authority

Dennis Rittenmeyer, president of the Lake County Regional Transportation Authority, appeared to review the activities of the authority and to make the case for the authorization of a Lake County food and beverage tax to fund the authority. Mr. Rittenmeyer and the members of the Commission discussed the possible uses of the requested tax revenue which include preliminary studies for the extension of the commuter rail line, replacing property taxes appropriated for existing transportation systems, and to expand services to underserved areas of Lake County. Mr. Rittenmeyer requested a resolution in support of a 1% food and beverage tax but noted that some members of the authority had discussed a 5% tax.

Mr. Dedelow moved the Commission to draft a resolution in support of a food and beverage tax of up to 5%. Sen. Rogers seconded the motion. The Commission discussed the motion briefly before Sen. Landske recognized John Livengood to testify in response to Mr. Rittenmeyer's request.

Mr. Livengood, President of the Restaurant and Hospitality Association of Indiana, voiced his support of transportation funding, but urged the Commission not to support a tax imposed only on the restaurant industry. Mr. Livengood testified against a food and beverage tax and in support of using a generally applicable county sales tax or county income tax to fund the authority.

When asked about the views of the Lake County Council, Mr. Rittenmeyer reported that the council favored the food and beverage tax by margin of 5-2. At the suggestion of Sen. Rogers, Mr. Dedelow amended his motion to request a resolution in support of a 1% food and beverage tax. The motion failed for lack of a majority when the vote ended in a 5-5 tie.

Indiana Department of Transportation--Hoosier Helpers

Kathy Noland, INDOT's Director of Communications and Legislative Affairs, reviewed the work of the Hoosier Helpers program. Ms. Noland noted that over 140,000 motorists have been assisted since the program's inception in 1991. Ms. Noland introduced Troy Boyd, the director of the program in Northwestern Indiana, to field the Commission's questions regarding the specifics of the program. Ms. Noland's report is Exhibit B.

Indiana Toll Road Exchanges

Ms. Noland began the discussion with a reminder that INDOT's studies have not been completed and that the department continues to review comments from the public.

Mike Puro, toll road director, explained that INDOT is considering moving the Portage toll road exchange in order to reduce the traffic congestion associated with a 300% increase in commuter traffic since 1987 (Exhibit C). Mr. Puro compared the proposal to move the exchange with two suggested alternatives: converting the toll road to an ordinary interstate highway; and abandoning the Portage toll plaza and collecting tolls only upon exiting the toll road. Mr. Puro estimated that the former entails \$245,000,000 in decommission costs and that the latter would require \$58,000,000 in construction costs. In contrast, Mr. Puro estimated the construction costs to move the toll plaza to mile post 37.5 at \$12,000,000.

The Commission questioned Mr. Puro on environmental concerns relating to the project, the proposed locations of the new toll plaza, and the department's communications with the commission and the public. Rep. Brown criticized the department's dissemination of information relating to the project and other projects affecting the toll road. Rep. Brown urged the department to provide the Commission with advance notice of the department's final decision on the location of a new toll plaza.

Rep. Duane Cheney opened the public testimony by testifying in support of moving the Portage toll plaza. Rep. Cheney also praised Mr. Puro and INDOT for their handling of the situation.

Jan Meyers took the floor on behalf of Citizens Against Noise, Ozone, and Toll road barriers (CANOT). Ms. Meyers explained CANOT's opposition to the proposal to move the Portage toll plaza to the east (Exhibit D).

Charlotte Robertson urged the Commission to adopt a resolution recommending the appointment of an interim study committee to study the operations of the toll road and toll road barrier issues. Ms. Robertson read the text of the proposed resolution to which Rep. Ayres suggested a few changes (Exhibit E). The Commission did not vote on the matter for lack of a quorum.

Others who opposed moving the toll plaza include Herb Read, Izaak Walton League; Tim Cole, Liberty Township Advisory Board; Barbara Stroud, Porter County Council; and Richard Chenoweth. Ms. Stroud presented the commission with a copy of a Porter County Resolution opposing the relocation (Exhibit F). Mr. Read and Mr. Cole both expressed their skepticism of the department's \$58,000,000 cost estimate to abandon the Portage toll plaza and collect tolls only upon exiting the toll road.

Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District

Gerald Hanas presented an overview of the district's planning priorities generally and discussed in detail the requirements of expanding the commuter line southward into Lake County. Mr. Hanas described the costs and the competitive environment in which the district vies for federal funding. Mr. Hanas' presentation is Exhibit G.

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC)

Dan Gardner presented NIRPC's list of federally funded surface transportation projects to the Commission. Mr. Gardner's presentation is Exhibit H.

Sen. Landske adjourned the meeting at 1:06 p.m.

